



Population Characteristics

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VOTER PARTICIPATION IN NOVEMBER 1974 (Advance report)

The American electorate in November 1974 was the largest of any previous election--141 million persons in the civilian noninstitutional population were eligible to vote on the basis of age (although several million were not eligible for other reasons, such as residence and citizenship requirements). However, only 45 percent of these persons reported that they actually cast a ballot in the November 5th Congressional election.¹ This turnout was about 10 percentage points lower than in the recent Congressional elections of 1966 and 1970 and 18 percentage points lower than the turnout in the 1972 Presidential election. (See table A.) These estimates are derived from a supplement to the Current Population Survey for November 1974 and refer to the civilian noninstitutional population.

The voter participation rate for blacks--34 percent--was lower than for whites, as had occurred in previous elections. (See table A.) The voting rate for persons of Spanish origin was even lower--23 percent of this group voted in the 1974 Congressional election. The low rate of participation for persons of Spanish origin is affected by the reported large number of noncitizens included in that group; about one-fourth of persons of

Spanish origin said that they did not register because of citizenship requirements, compared with 3 percent of the total population.

Results from the Current Population Survey show that fewer persons voted both because fewer were registered to vote and fewer voted of those who were registered. Sixty-two percent of persons 18 years old and over reported that they had registered to vote in 1974; this level was down 10 percentage points from the 1972 Presidential election and was 6 percentage points lower than the 1970 Congressional election. In addition, of those who were registered 28 percent did not vote in 1974 compared with 13 percent in 1972 and 20 percent in 1970. The shrinkage in the proportion of the registered who voted, as well as the decline in the proportion registered, occurred in all age groups of the electorate and for both blacks and whites. Declines in registration rates since 1966 have occurred in all regions of the country; however, the declines in the North and West exceeded those in the South. (See table B.)

Registration rates for blacks have been lower than for whites in each election since 1966, the year in which the Census Bureau first collected data on voter registration. The decline in the registration levels since 1966, however, has not been as great for Negroes as for whites--8 percentage points for whites versus 5 percentage points for Negroes.² Registration rates for blacks

¹This reported estimate of 45 percent compares with 39 percent from the preliminary count of actual votes cast as published in Congressional Quarterly, Volume XXXII, No. 45, November 9, 1974. Previous survey experience has shown that there is a tendency for persons to overreport voter participation in the CPS and other surveys. A discussion of the overreporting of voter participation is presented in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 253.

²The difference cited in this sentence is only significant with .94 confidence, whereas other statements in this report are statistically significant with .95 confidence. See Current Population Reports Series P-20, No. 253 for a discussion of the reliability of estimates.

Table A. Reported Voter Participation Rates, by Region and Race: November 1966 to 1974

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Region, race, and Spanish origin	Congressional elections			Presidential elections	
	1974	1970	1966	1972	1968
UNITED STATES					
Total, voting age.....	141,299	120,701	112,800	136,203	116,535
Percent Reported Voted					
Total.....	44.7	54.6	55.4	63.0	67.8
White.....	46.3	56.0	57.0	64.5	69.1
Negro.....	33.8	43.5	41.7	52.1	57.6
Spanish origin ¹	22.9	(NA)	(NA)	37.5	(NA)
NORTH AND WEST					
Total, voting age.....	96,505	83,515	78,355	93,653	81,594
Percent Reported Voted					
Total.....	48.8	59.0	60.9	66.4	71.0
White.....	50.0	59.8	61.7	67.5	71.8
Negro.....	37.9	51.4	52.1	56.7	64.8
SOUTH					
Total, voting age.....	44,794	37,186	34,445	42,550	34,941
Percent Reported Voted					
Total.....	36.0	44.7	43.0	55.4	60.1
White.....	37.4	46.4	45.1	57.0	61.9
Negro.....	30.0	36.8	32.9	47.8	51.6

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.

Note: Includes persons 18 years old and over in Georgia and Kentucky, 19 years old and over in Alaska, 20 years old and over in Hawaii, and 21 years old and over in the remaining States in 1966, 1968, and 1970. Includes all persons 18 years old and over in 1972 and 1974.

living in the South are not statistically different in 1974 from those in 1966; however, in 1974 the registration rate for blacks was only 5 percentage points lower than that of whites compared with 11 percentage points difference in 1966. In the North and West regions, registration rates for blacks declined more than the rates for whites since 1966.

The lowest registration and voting turnout in 1974 occurred among young persons--21 percent of 18-to 20-year olds reported that they had voted--and the highest rates were in the age group 55 to 64 years old; 58 percent of this age group reported they had voted. Although slightly more women than men voted, the turnout rate is lower for women than for men because women outnumber men by 8.5 million persons.

Reasons given for not voting or registering are shown in Tables 2 through 4. Of all persons who did not vote (including both those who were not registered and those who were registered but did not vote) 21 million persons said that they did not register or vote because of such factors as lack of citizenship, lack of transportation, physical disability, voting machines not working, residence requirements not satisfied, or similar reasons. Another 29 million persons, 20 percent of all persons 18 years old and over, reported that they did not register or vote because they were not interested, disliked politics, or similar reasons. Thus, interest factors, in addition to legal and physical barriers, were major contributors to the low participation rates in this Congressional election.

Table B. Reported Registration Rates, by Region and Race: November 1966 to 1974

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Region, race, and Spanish origin	Congressional elections			Presidential elections	
	1974	1970	1966	1972	1968
UNITED STATES					
Total, voting age.....	62.2	68.1	70.3	72.3	74.3
White.....	63.5	69.1	71.6	73.4	75.4
Negro.....	54.9	60.8	60.8	65.5	66.2
Spanish origin ¹	34.9	(NA)	(NA)	44.4	(NA)
NORTH AND WEST					
Total, voting age.....	63.3	70.0	73.8	73.9	76.5
White.....	64.6	70.8	74.5	74.9	77.2
Negro.....	54.2	64.5	68.8	67.0	71.8
SOUTH					
Total, voting age.....	59.8	63.8	62.2	68.7	69.2
White.....	61.0	65.1	64.3	69.8	70.8
Negro.....	55.5	57.5	52.9	64.0	61.6

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.

Of the 25 million persons who were registered, but did not vote, 7.7 million reported that they had been unable to go to the polls because of illness, disability, or inability to take time off from work. Another 7.7 million reported that they were not interested in the election, did not like the candidates, or did not think their vote would matter. Others were out of town or did not know of the election.

This report provides advance statistics on voting and registration; more detailed tabulations and analysis will be presented in a forthcoming report. Statistics presented in this report are based on answers to a series of questions asked of a sample of persons of voting age two weeks

after the elections of November 5. The questions were designed to provide information on voting behavior and reasons for nonparticipation of the various segments of the population.

Since the data presented in this report are based on a sample of the population, they are, of course, subject to sampling errors. Confidence limits of 95 percent probability were applied to all statements of this report. This means that the chances are at least 19 in 20 that a difference identified in the text indicates a true difference in the population rather than the chance variations arising from the use of samples. Estimates of the size of the sampling errors will be included in the forthcoming detailed report.